

Tracy Adult School faces demise despite a passionate defense

by Cassie Tomlin/ TP staff

Mar 10, 2010 |



The Tracy Adult School moved into their new site in December of 2009 but could close in the next round of budget cuts. Press file photo

This May, Alison Haynes will earn her high school diploma at Tracy Adult School.

She's 20 years old, a working mom to 4-year-old Andrew, and one of 25 students on track to graduate from the campus this year.

Tuesday night, Haynes told the Tracy Unified School District's board of trustees she doesn't know what she would've done without her teachers and counselors — she used the word “thankful” at least five times.

But Tracy Adult School appears dangerously close to shutting down. The board could vote March 30 to slash \$1.2 million — accounting for most of the school's budget and all of its full-time instructors.

The cuts would close the school, adult school director Dave Pickering said.

The board has to save the district \$12.9 million before the 2010-11 school year starts, and as part of the cuts is also considering laying off about 75 elementary teachers and not spending any money on school supplies. Because of declining state revenue, the district plans to shave about \$15 million by 2012-13.

Superintendent Jim Franco has said the process is agonizing.

“We've worked hard as a district to create the very programs we're now dismantling to make sure our budget is balanced,” he said.

Tracy Adult School teaches English as a second language to about 250 people, offers credit recovery for off-track kids while they attend any of Tracy's three high schools, and awards

diplomas to adults.

Teacher Donna Ensor told the board that leaving the school next year with 7 percent of its operating budget would mean the district would lose an “indispensable partner” to the school system.

Diana Souza, another teacher, said that in three years, 3,287 high school students have caught up on credits so they can graduate on time from West and Tracy high schools.

“Because our name has the word ‘adult,’ people think we have only adults,” Souza said. “We’ve been helping high school students make up failed classes for 46 years and awarded over 2,220 high school diplomas.”

The district also offers credit recovery, though space is often limited, at Stein High School and at a “cyber school” through online classes at Duncan-Russell High School.

Richard Soto said Tracy Adult School is a last option for students to graduate, “again and again and again.”

And for its older students, Soto said, the mission of the school is evolving. It recently opened a career center, and last week, San Joaquin Delta College representatives spoke there about financial aid and application deadlines.

“We’re moving in the direction of students not just completing their diploma or GED, but moving on. These are individuals who go out, get jobs and pay taxes,” Soto said.

Haynes told the board she wanted to represent all Tracy Adult School students, some of whom might be first-generation high school graduates.

When she got to Tracy Adult School at age 18, after she had been told she was too old to enroll at West High School, Haynes tearfully said, Soto assured her that her life wasn’t over.

She said earning her GED isn’t enough — she wants to eventually become a pharmacist, and she plans to attend college starting in May.

She said she’s getting invaluable preparation for college from Tracy Adult School. Because her teachers encourage her to apply herself and not rush, she scored a 99 percent on her most recent test, she said.

“I never thought I was that type of person to almost get a 100,” she said.

Another student, Juana Olsen, said the school has helped her threefold. In 2006, she brushed up on her English with classes there; she later took a course that helped her earn her U.S. citizenship; and she is now earning her high school diploma.

She said Tracy Adult School helped her become more independent and successful and gave her the skills to help her three children with their homework.

"It's given me the opportunity to educate myself and to plan for a better future for myself and my family," she said.

- *Contact Tracy Press reporter Cassie Tomlin at 830-4225 or ctomlin@tracypress.com.*